

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Ms Nicole Jacobs
Domestic Abuse Commissioner
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London Assembly
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
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18th September 2019

Dear Commissioner,

I am writing on behalf of the London Assembly to congratulate you on your appointment as Domestic Abuse Commissioner. This is a vitally important role at a time when, sadly, domestic abuse rates continue to rise at an alarming rate.

Given the importance of your new role, I wanted to draw your attention to the London Assembly's campaign for a Domestic Abusers Register to be included in the Domestic Abuse Bill when it is reintroduced in the Queen's Speech.

In September 2017, Assembly Members unanimously supported a motion to seek legislative change to allow for the establishment of a register for serial domestic abuse offenders. This followed a report by Len Duvall AM, *Domestic Abuse in London: Addressing the problem*, which recommended the establishment of a register, comparable to the sex offenders register. The report followed the murder in Catford of a five-year-old boy, Alex Malcom. The perpetrator, Marvyn Iheanacho, was the partner of Alex's mother, Lilya Breha. Ms Breha had no knowledge that Iheanacho had an extensive history of violence, including attacks on five previous partners. No information was disclosed by the police under the 'Right to Know' element of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, otherwise known as Clare's Law.

Assembly Members have since chosen to take this forward as a cross-party campaign recognising that the number of victims of domestic violence in London has significantly risen in recent years. Since 2014, the number of victims recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service has increased by 15%, representing almost 10,000 additional cases. This shocking level of domestic abuse in London is a snapshot of a much higher figure nationally and provides a compelling case for more robust action against perpetrators.

While the Government has done more to protect against domestic abuse using Domestic Violence Protection Orders, Criminal Behaviour Orders, and the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, it is obvious that the tools given to the police are inconsistent. The police are also taking extra steps to protect domestic abuse victims for example, through the Met's Operation Dauntless+, which tracks just over 400 serial cross-border domestic abuse offenders, but this operation is restricted by limited resource.

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The London Assembly is not alone in calling for a shift in focus to the perpetrators of domestic abuse. In 2017, a joint report on domestic abuse by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, and HM Inspectorate of Probation, concluded that far too little is being done to prevent domestic abuse. It stated that the focus now needs to be on the perpetrator, looking at patterns of behaviour and preventing incidents before they occur. Paladin, the National Stalking Advocacy Service has also been vocal in its call for the government to create a register, arguing that it is the perpetrators of domestic abuse, not the victims that should be tracked. A Domestic Abusers Register would give the police a significant tool to enable this change.

The London Assembly notes the Government's recent announcement to reintroduce the Domestic Abuse Bill in the Queen's Speech. However, the Bill as was introduced in the 2017 – 2019 Parliamentary session, did not include a commitment to introduce a national register of domestic violence perpetrators, as recommended by the Home Affairs Committee in its 2018 report on domestic abuse. This is a missed opportunity to make a lasting impact on how police forces are able to respond to domestic abuse. As was noted by the Committee, the current mechanism used to monitor domestic violence perpetrators, the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, is dependent on an individual asking about an offender's history, meaning many abusers are missed, to devastating effect.

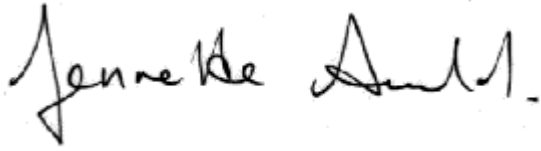
The introduction of a Domestic Abusers Register will allow the police to maintain up to date information about repeat and serious perpetrators, increase understanding and reduce crimes which account for such high demand on police time. Most importantly, it would put the police in a much stronger position to protect the victims and survivors of domestic violence. Unlike current reporting requirements, police forces would be given the information they require to actively manage risk based on the offending history of repeat perpetrators. This allows police forces to make interventions when necessary and visit offenders to ensure that potential partners of those individuals are as safe as possible.

We are pleased that the London Assembly's campaign has received support from the Mayor of London, the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), various domestic violence charities, and women who have suffered at the hands of domestic abusers. We press you, in your new role as Domestic Abuse Commissioner to urgently review the existing framework for dealing with domestic violence perpetrators, including our call for a Domestic Abusers Register. It is clear that the existing framework is not fit for purpose, and a register is urgently required.

I would like to request a meeting with you to discuss the London Assembly's campaign in more detail, and to hear about how you propose to use your new role to tackle domestic abuse in London and across the country.

Yours Sincerely,

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jeanette Arnold". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeanette Arnold OBE AM
Chair of the London Assembly